

THE WILLIAM ROCKHILL NELSON GALLERY OF ART

AND ATKINS MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

NEWS

FLASHES

January 1,

1939

LOAN GALLERIES: The Fifth Anniversary Exhibition of important sculpture added to the permanent collection during the past five years has been so popular that it will be continued for the month of January. The Egyptian Figure of a Man, which makes such an impressive spectacle as it seems to glow at the far end of the central loan gallery, has won universal approval. It is overpowering in its majesty and strength as it strides towards the spectator with the slow tread of centuries. Many visitors have found new beauties in the Saint John of Tiziano Aspetti and it appears perhaps to better advantage in an overhead light. The Greek Archaic Head is still one of the most admired objects in the group. With its air of serenity and its downcast eyes, it has a definite aloofness which contrasts with the aggressive quality of the Egyptian Figure and it gives the impression of harboring some mystic knowledge. The casual visitor will find much to interest him as every great period of sculpture is represented. The student will find valuable material in the progression of naturalistic modelling, from the abstract forms of the Cycladic Idol to the realistic muscles of the Saint John.

Through the generosity of Mrs. Clyde H. Porter, the south loan gallery and Gallery XVI will be installed with a group of drawings and watercolours by the American artist, Alfred Jacob Miller. Painted almost a century ago, their subject matter is the American Indian and they are particularly valid as they are the sketches made on the spot when Miller traveled through the West on an expedition with the Englishman, Captain William Drummond Stewart. Thus the series is perhaps the most authentic panorama of the Middle West of one hundred years ago that remains to us.

Miller was born in Baltimore in 1810 and began painting at an early age. His first teacher was Thomas Sully and later he went to Europe to study, spending some time in France where he made copies of the old masters in the Louvre and became acquainted with Henry Vernet, one of the leading landscapists of that period. He returned to America in 1834 to settle down to become a portrait painter, but an adventuresome nature took him to New Orleans and it was here that he met and later joined Captain Stewart. Their journey took them up the Mississippi to St. Louis and then across to Lexington, Chouteau's Landing and Independence. Later they went north to Fort Laramie and Wind River.

In addition to the authenticity of the costumes and customs of the Indians, the sketches show very definite talent. In some, the watercolours are strengthened by oil which adds to their carrying power. There is much European influence in them, the landscapes show a knowledge of the work of Vernet, many of them are carried out like 18th century French drawings, with dark figures in the foreground, silhouetted against lightly sketched distances worked only in pencil. The handling of the buffaloes, mules and mountain sheep is especially successful and one forgives Miller for his horses recall those of Gericault, so spirited are they.

Most of the sketches bear the titles written in the hand of the artist and they must have been jotted down at the time they were made, as later he added thin oil washes which have partly obscured the notations. They were evidently made as material for large oil paintings and undoubtedly these spontaneous studies are far more interesting than the more formal canvases.

Few people realize that January 7th marks the one hundredth anniversary of the first real progress made in the field of photography. It is true that the principles of the camera obscura or dark room were known in the time of Aristotle and that Leonardo da Vinci describes this device in his manuscripts, but the first photographs made by a camera were achieved by Niepce in the 19th century. Later Daguerre cooperated with Niepce and it was on January 7, 1839, that Arago, the famous scientist, presented the process of the two

men to the Academy of Science and proposed that the French government should buy the full rights after the value of the discovery had been proven by thorough investigation. After many difficulties, this was accomplished and photography became a fact.

In celebration of this important anniversary, the north loan gallery will be installed with a group of photographs from the Camera Pictorialists. These will cover a wide range of subject matter and will illustrate the great advance that has been made in the original process of Niepce and Daguerre. The Pictorialists have arranged for a lecture to be given in Atkins Auditorium at 8 P.M. on Saturday evening, January 7th. At this time, Professor Robert Taft of Kansas University, will present an illustrated lecture on "A Century of Photography in America". Professor Taft is the author of the only complete and authentic history of American Photography. The lecture will be open without charge to the general public and entrance will be by Rockhill Road.

MASTERPIECE OF THE MONTH: The Masterpiece for January is particularly appropriate for the Christmas season. It is a new acquisition, a French Gothic Madonna and Child of the 15th century, and is being shown for the first time. It will be placed in the Masterpiece Room on Saturday, December 24th.

Its background is the France that emerged, partly destroyed, from the destruction of the Hundred Years War, of the superstitious "spider king" Louis XI and of the romantic vagabond poet, Francois Villon. It seems extraordinary that so beautiful and idealistic a sculpture could have been produced in such troubled times. After the great Cathedrals of France were built in the 13th and early 14th centuries, the carvers turned their attention to furnishing devotional statues for the main altars and many chapels. The cult of the Madonna and Child increased in popularity during this time and thousands of representations were made for devout worshippers.

For the most part, these were donated by the wealthy burgher class and schools of workshops grew up in the main centers of France and from them the statues were sent to all parts of the country. One of the most important centers was in the city of Troyes and our new sculpture seems to have come from there. It was found in the private chapel of the Chateau of Gisors, near Rouen. It is marked by that relaxation, often called detente, which was an abandonment of the harsh realism of the full Gothic period for a greater idealism. The Madonna now becomes more a devoted mother than the Queen of Heaven and there is a tender relationship between her and her Son.

Sculpture of this period was usually painted and there are many traces of the polychromy left, yellow and gold leaf on the Madonna's hair, red and blue on her robe and green on the dress of the Child. It must have been the work of a master carver who has fully caught the spirit of his subject which he has rendered with an ingratiating charm. Most extraordinary of all is the preservation of the two figures. The waves of iconoclasm of the reformation destroyed many of the Gothic monuments, but here not one tress of the hair, one sharp edge of the beautifully composed drapery or one of the long, nervous fingers is damaged. Our new acquisition is one of the loveliest representations of the Madonna and Child of the 15th century and one of the most complete.

WEDNESDAY EVENING LECTURES: The series of discussions on the History of Italian Painting will be resumed during January. On the evening of January 4th, the artists working in the first quarter of the fifteenth century will be considered. These include the great innovators Masolino and Masaccio and the retardative but entirely charming work of Don Lorenzo Monaco, Fra Angelico, and Benozzo Gozzoli.

One of the greatest contributions to modern painting was made by a group of experimenting and ever-searching artists working in Florence in the middle of the 1400's. Through their efforts, linear and aerial perspective, a complete knowledge of anatomy, a study of natural forms in landscape and an improvement in the technique of painting were effected. In this group the names of Ucello, Andrea del Castagna, Domenicho Veneziano and Pollaiuolo stand out. Their work will be discussed on Wednesday evening, January 11th.

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After 1450, the contributions of the experimentors were assimilated by a group of men who paved the way for the full Renaissance. In their hands, painting assumed all the sophistication of today. This group includes Fillipo Lippi, Ghirlandaio, Verrocchio, and Piero della Francesca. Their work, mostly sincere and devout religious subjects, will be the topic for Wednesday evening, January 18th.

On January 25th, the painting of the older group of men who were active in the full Renaissance will be considered. Such familiar painters as Piero di Cosimo, Lorenzo di Credi, Fillipino Lippi, and Botticelli will be studied at this time.

All four lectures will be given by Mr. Gardner. They are held at 8 p.m. in Atkins Auditorium and there is no charge to the Gallery or the lecture.

CANDID CAMERA CONTEST: The results of the Candid Camera Contest, which was a part of the Fifth Anniversary Celebration, have been most gratifying. During Gallery Week, the building was thronged with visitors armed with cameras, flashlights, and lamps. Over eighty photographs were submitted and some of them are of professional calibre.

The contest was judged by a jury composed of William R. Brown, Dick Millard and Claude Graham which made the following awards: First Prize of \$15.00 to J. C. Turney; Second Prize of \$10.00 to C. I. Graham, and Honorable Mentions to Henry Clark, Kenneth Hadley, Ed. Miller, Jr., W. D. Modler, Frances Rosenbury, and Jack Strandberg.

Interesting conclusions can be drawn from the prints submitted. Some of the contestants seemed to fail to catch the idea of the contest and merely made photographs of objects in the collection, but the majority were very original and interesting shorts of sections of the Gallery of visitors examining works of art. The Oriental objects, such as the Siva, the Sung Kuan Yin, the Lohan, the Japanese Wooden Figure, seemed the most popular subjects.

The jury selected a group of about thirty of the photographs which will be exhibited in Gallery XIII for the month of January. The interest in this contest was so widespread that it is planned to make it a yearly event during the Anniversary Week.

FRIENDS OF ART: At their annual meeting on December 9th, the Friends of Art voted for and presented to the permanent collection, a superb example of the painting of Henry Lee McFee, a Missouri artist. Entitled "Fruit and Leaves", it is a soundly executed still life, an arrangement of brown and seer leaves in a vase, about which tomatoes and avocados are grouped. The colour is especially beautiful and the handling of his medium proves that McFee is one of America's finest technicians. The artist was not concerned with any social message in his canvas and it was painted primarily for the sheer joy of applying the rich oil pigments to canvas. The result is one of the most distinguished examples yet to come to the collection of contemporary painting.

On Wednesday morning, January 11th at 11 o'clock, the Friends of Art will meet in the Library for their regular discussion class. The McFee Still Life will be presented at that time and a resume of the contemporary exhibitions in New York.

GALLERY ACTIVITIES: The General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation has invited the Director to attend a conference on Educational Work in the Museum for Secondary Schools, to be held in Cleveland on January 14th and 15th.

The series of University Prints on Early Chinese Art, edited by Mr. Sickman of the Gallery Staff, has just appeared. Fourteen out of 165 plates are devoted to objects in the permanent collection of the Gallery.

Both the Art News and the Art Digest devoted important illustrated articles to the Fifth Anniversary Exhibition and the new acquisition, the Egyptian Figure.

An article by Alfred Salmony on the recent exhibition of Chinese .

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Bronzes held at the Metropolitan Museum has just appeared in the Burlington Magazine. In speaking of the high quality of the objects, Mr. Salmony writes that those from our Gallery deserve the greatest praise.

MUSICAL PROGRAMS: Attention is called to the fine musical programs which are given every Sunday afternoon at three-thirty in the Atkins Auditorium. These offer a wide range of interest and are attracting to the Gallery and its collections groups which might not otherwise spend Sunday afternoons with us. These concerts are increasing the Gallery attendance and their assistance in this is especially appreciated. For a list of individual concerts, see the calendar for January.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES: The public school program, which has accommodated some 10,000 sixth and seventh grade pupils with a series of demonstrations and tours based on the study of the Gallery, has been extended to include the pupils in the lower grades.

A group of tours through specific sections of the Gallery has been submitted by Paul Gardner, Director, to the school principals from which the teachers of the second, third, fourth, and fifth grades may make a selection. Docents from the Education Department will conduct the tours which have been planned to augment the regular school curriculum.

CALENDAR FOR JANUARY

Wed., Jan. 4, 8:00 - Auditorium - Lecture: Florentine Painters of the First Quarter of the 15th Century.
 Sat., " 7, 8:00 - Auditorium - Lecture: History of American Photography - Professor Robert Taft.
 Sun., " 8, 3:30 - Auditorium - Concert by Kansas City Federal Concert Orchestra
 Wed., " 11, 11:00 - Library - Friends of Art Study Class.
 Wed., " 11, 8:00 - Auditorium - Lecture: Early Experimentors
 Sun., " 15, 3:30 - Auditorium - Concert: Sigma Alpha Iota Sorority
 Wed., " 18, 8:00 - Auditorium - Lecture: The Middle Florentine Renaissance.
 Sun., " 22, 4:00 - Concert - Auditorium - Young Artists from the Studios of Lois Black Hunt and Edna Forsythe
 Wed., " 25, 11:00 - Library - Friends of Art Study Class.
 Wed., " 25, 8:00 - Auditorium - Lecture: The Full Florentine Renaissance.
 Sun., " 29, 3:30 - Auditorium - Concert: Conservatory of Music of Kansas City.

William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art
 Kansas City, Missouri

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